GUIDANCE ON PROTECTING INDOOR AIR QUALITY IN YOUR HOME DURING WILDFIRE SMOKE EVENTS

Purpose:
This document provides practical guidance for New Brunswickers to better protect indoor air quality in their homes during wildfire events.

Background:
Wildfire smoke can make the air dangerous to breathe.
Wildfire smoke contains harmful pollutants such as fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen oxides (NOx), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These can enter your home and pose serious health risks. Exposure to these pollutants can lead to lung and heart issues, particularly among vulnerable populations such as young children, seniors, pregnant women, and people with health conditions.

What are Cleaner Air Spaces:
Cleaner air spaces are designated indoor environments where measures are put in place to ensure air quality is improved to provide temporary relief from wildfire smoke.
Cleaner air spaces help people stay safe when the air outside is smoky.

Creating a Cleaner Air Space in your Home:
To keep the air clean inside your home, consider the following:

- **Seal your home to keep smoke from getting inside**. Close all windows and doors tightly. When possible, use door sweeps, weather stripping, caulking or foam strips to seal gaps around windows.
- **Designate a room in your home to use as a cleaner air space.** Choose a room with few windows and doors. Keep the windows and doors closed and minimize entry and exit. Avoid activities that worsen air quality (e.g., vacuuming, burning candles, frying food).
- **Use air filtration.** Use a portable air cleaner with a HEPA filter rated for the size of your room. If you have a central HVAC system, install filters with a MERV rating of 13 or higher, if compatible. Keep extra filters on hand and replace/change filters regularly during smoke events to maintain effectiveness.

- **Monitor outside air quality.** Use apps or websites to check the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)
- **Keep space cool and comfortable:**
    - Indoor temperature should be kept below 26°C.
    - Maintain relative humidity between 35–50%.
    - Use air conditioning if available and required but ensure that it recirculates indoor air rather than drawing in outdoor air.
- **Limit indoor pollutant sources.** Avoid smoking indoors or burning candles. Do not use wood burning stoves or fireplace and limit the use of gas stove and exhaust fans unless outdoor air quality improves.
- **Prepare for possible power outages.** Have a backup power source (e.g., battery-powered air cleaner or generator placed away from air intakes). Keep extra batteries on hand.
- **Cleaning protocols**: Use wet cloths or mops to avoid stirring up dust when cleaning. Avoid vacuuming without a HEPA filter unless your vacuum exhausts to the outside. Limit the use of chemicals products.

Considerations:

- Vulnerable individuals (children, seniors, people with chronic illnesses) should stay in cleaner air spaces as much as possible.
- Ensure medications and emergency contacts are accessible.

For more detailed information and guidance, please consult the following:

- *Guidance for Cleaner Air Spaces during Wildfire Smoke Events, Health Canada, 2020*.
- *Air Quality Health Index.*